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Outwitting the Clothes Moth

A radio interview between Miss Ruth Van Deman of the Bureau of Home Economics and Dr. E. A. Back of the Bureau of Entomology, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, broadcast by a network of 48 associate NBC stations, Tuesday, May 17, 1932.

MISS VAN DEMAN: How do you do, Everybody:

Some time ago I asked Doctor Back of the Bureau of Entomology whether he would come over here to the studio some day this spring and tell you the best, most effective way to get ahead of the clothes moth. He very kindly consented. Then the weather began to play tricks. Instead of putting our winter clothes away, we had to go on wearing them. Even now, far be it from me to predict that warm weather is here to stay. But anyway, it's warm enough for the clothes moths to be flying. From May to July, and again during September and October, I believe, is the most active season for the moth millers the country over. In our steamheated houses, we may see them almost anytime during the winter.

Of course, we all know how these little buff-colored moth millers look. We've all grabbed for them more or less successfully as they fluttered in a dark corner or just beyond the brightest rays of the lamp in the evening. But, Dr. Back, if we want to protect our clothes and our upholstered furniture from damage from moths, we've got to kill them off long before they fly about as millers, haven't we?

DR. BACK: Yes, Miss Van Deman, the moth millers that flutter about can themselves do our belongings no harm. These moth millers have only imperfectly developed mouth parts; they can't eat any kind of a fabric, or anything else for that matter. Their sole purpose in life is to lay eggs. The little worms, or larvae, hatched from the eggs the millers lay, are the ones that do the damage. The moth larvae like best to feed upon wool, fur, hair, and feathers, and the fact that the wool is dyed and woven into cloth, or the hair made up into a bristle brush makes it only slightly less attractive to the moths.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Well, it would seem that it's up to us to keep our good woollens and furs out of the reach of the moth millers when they are on the wing. Or if we can't do that, then we must destroy the eggs before they hatch. We've all heard lots of ways of fighting moths. Dr. Back, in your years of study of moths, I know you must have tried one after another. Now, could you give us just two or three simple effective ways that any one of us can use whether we live in the city or the country?

DR. BACK: Well, first of all, be sure your woollens are clean before you put them away for the summer. Have them dry cleaned, wash them, or brush and air and sponge them. And after you get them clean, then don't leave them

(over)

lying around uncovered. Remember the moth millers are flying and laying eggs these days and they might very easily settle on your nice clean blankets and infest them.

Now, there are lots of moth repellants on the market. For use in the home I believe it is best to stick to chemicals that are non-inflammable, easy to handle, and fairly inexpensive. There are two good ones that measure up to this standard -- naphthalene and paradichlorobenzene. Both of these come in the form of white crystals, and a pound of either of them will protect a trunkful of clothes through the summer. Sometimes paradichlorobenzene is sold under the name of dichlorocide or paradi. The whole word certainly is a jaw breaker.

The cost of these chemicals is so slight in comparison with the value of the woolens you are trying to protect that I believe in overdosing. Also they evaporate gradually, and it is the fumes that keep the moth eggs from hatching or kill the larvae before they can do any damage.

So pack your clean woolens away in a clean trunk or cardboard boxes lined with paper, or simply wrap them up well in unbroken paper. Sprinkle the naphthalene or the paradichlorobenzene liberally all over each woolen article as you spread it out and put some of the crystals at the bottom and on the top for good measure. Close up the trunk or tie up the packages, and I think you can be reasonably sure that your woolens will be free from moths all summer.

MISS VAN DEMAN: That's fine, Dr. Back, for blankets and things that don't wrinkle, but what about coats and suits that keep their shape better on hangers? Do you recommend the garment bags scented with cedar or tar?

DR. BACK: Oh yes, they are helpful in just the same way as the paper wrapping or the cardboard box. They keep the moth millers from lighting on the garments, but they don't kill the moth eggs. It's a good plan to sprinkle some naphthalene flakes or some paradichlorobenzene crystals into one of these heavy paper bags before you seal it up. The fumes of the chemical will act in the heavy bag just as in the trunk or the cardboard box, although they escape more quickly through the bags.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Well, I'm glad to know just how to use these garment bags. Now, one more question, Dr. Back. What about using naphthalene or paradichlorobenzene in a whole room. Is that practical?

DR. BACK: Yes, I have found it so. If you are going away for awhile, you can put several pieces of upholstered furniture, rugs, and clothing in a large closet or a small room (say 12 x 15 x 15 feet) and spread from 8 to 10 pounds of the chemical on paper on the floor. Then close up the windows and door and wedge them tight. This seems to be a very effective way of keeping moths inactive if not of killing them outright. There's no fire risk attached to it and the crystals do no harm to the rugs or furnishings.

There is also a liquid mixture excellent for fumigating a room or a trunk or other tight container. It has the advantage of not burning or exploding. I'm sorry but it also has a long name; it's called the ethylene dichloridecarbon tetrachloride mixture.

MISS VAN DEMAN: My, that would be something of a tax on the memory, ethylene dichloride-carbon tetrachloride. But we can find the names of these chemicals used in moth control in your bulletins, I believe, Dr. Back. Thank you for giving us these clear, practical directions for protecting our garments against moths.

If any one listening in wants more information on clothes moths write to the Department of Agriculture for Farmers' Bulletin 1353. "Clothes Moth and their Control" is the title; and I'll repeat the number, Farmers' Bulletin 1353.

Now next week, if Dr. Back is willing, we'll continue this subject and give you the latest facts on how to keep your upholstered furniture free of this destructive pest.

Goodbye, for this time!

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